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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Seventieth session

Summary record of the 1612th meeting*
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 10 July 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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* No summary records were issued for the 1610th and 1611th meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Fifth periodic report of Turkmenistan (CEDAW/C/TKM/5; CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/5 and CEDAW/C/TKM/Q/5/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Turkmenistan took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Govshudov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government had been undertaking a series of reforms aimed at promoting socioeconomic development while further enhancing the role of women in social, political, economic and cultural life. Gender analysis and the monitoring of Turkmenistan's legislation from a gender perspective had shown that progress was being made in many areas, and the process of developing a gender policy was ongoing. A new Constitution had been adopted on 14 September 2016. It included a section of 11 articles on freedoms and rights of citizens that were in line with international law. The amended Constitution took account of the Committee's recommendations to ensure that gender equality was guaranteed at all levels of public life.

3. On 1 January 2017, the Ombudsman Act had come into force. An Ombudsman had been appointed by the parliament in March that year and had been provided with appropriate institutional support. The Ombudsman and his or her deputy enjoyed legal immunity. The Ombudsman was independent of any other State body and represented no political party or other voluntary association. The Ombudsman's mandate included providing for the protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

4. Turkmenistan had crafted a strategy to promote gender equality and sought to bring its legislation into line with generally accepted international standards relating to equality between women and men. The Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men implemented the provisions of relevant international conventions and would greatly assist Turkmenistan in developing and promoting gender equality in Turkmenistan. It established equal rights for women and men in all areas of political and public life. Of the 125 deputies in the parliament, 31, or nearly 25 per cent, were women. Women were also represented in executive and legislative bodies at all levels; they made up over 20 per cent of the 240 members of the people's councils, 26 per cent of the 1,200 members of the people's councils in districts and municipalities and 22 per cent of the 5,900 members of the local authorities. Women represented 45 per cent of the total active workforce. Some 24 per cent of managerial roles were held by women. In 2017, 43 per cent of the economically active population were women, an increase from the 2016 level. The number of women registered with employment agencies rose from 29 per cent in 2016 to 30 per cent in 2017. Of the total number of women registered as available for work in 2017, 89 per cent were now in employment.

5. The national social and economic development programmes of Turkmenistan integrated the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To implement the Agenda, in September 2017, the Institute of International Relations had opened a research centre to study the Sustainable Development Goals. An implementation plan had been approved by the President in November 2017. A high-level national committee and an interdepartmental technical committee oversaw implementation efforts.

6. In addition to its National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2015–2020 and the National Action Plan on Human Rights 2016–2020, the Government had adopted, on 22 June 2018, a National Action Plan on the Rights of Children for 2018–2022. The Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Commitments Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law was the body responsible for coordinating the measures introduced by the plans. The national plans took account of the concluding observations of the international treaty bodies and the recommendations made under the 2013 and 2018 universal periodic reviews. Turkmenistan engaged actively with international human rights bodies. Turkmenistan had been elected to the Commission on the Status of Women for 2018–2022, the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund for 2018–2020 and of the Economic and

Social Council for 2019–2021. Engagement with those bodies contributed to the Government's efforts to promote gender equality in Turkmenistan.

7. Turkmenistan was combating stereotypical conceptions of women's and men's roles through a range of strategic activities including awareness-raising campaigns on the Convention and media campaigns. In cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Government had organized 30 seminars to promote gender equality during the period covered by the report. An information centre had been established specifically to provide information on human rights issues to all civil servants, and regular seminars and round-table meetings were held to inform the public of the laws governing human rights. In April 2018, under the national action plan on gender equality, the Government published a compilation of documents entitled "The Rights of Women in Turkmenistan: International Legal Instruments and Legislative Acts of Turkmenistan". A teacher's manual on how to raise awareness of gender issues, particularly through the media, had been elaborated, and a course on gender equality had been piloted in Ashgabat University, with a view to holding similar courses in other higher education establishments throughout Turkmenistan. UNFPA had organized a major briefing session on gender issues for journalists, followed by a competition, with awards going to the authors of the best articles on gender equality.

8. The Presidential Academy of Public Administration had included a gender perspective in its middle-level management training programmes, and an information centre attached to the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan ran seminars and workshops for judges to ensure that they were kept informed on gender issues. Under the State policy framework for the development of the judicial system for 2017–2021, approved by the President in 2017, that information centre would be further reinforced. A training programme covering various fields of legislation had been established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and included a specific module devoted to gender equality and domestic violence. Gender equality, children's rights and other human rights were also covered.

9. In higher education, there continued to be a disproportionate number of men who pursued technical studies. However, the gap had been closing and had narrowed by more than 3 per cent between 2013 and 2017. All educational and vocational training institutions guaranteed equal access for women and men. Efforts were made to attract young people to scientific studies and to participate in sport, and, indeed, Turkmen sportswomen and men had met with considerable success in national and international competitions recently. Educational material reflected gender issues and included, for the senior classes (years 7 to 10), such topics as reproductive health.

10. Turkmenistan did not at present have a specific law on violence against women or domestic violence, and the Government was considering the elaboration of appropriate legislation to protect women from all forms of violence. One of the aims of the national action plan in the field of human rights was to make sure the national legislation criminalized all forms of violence. A current study on domestic violence sought to identify the root causes of the problem, and its results would be either for the introduction of amendments to the current laws or the drafting of new legislation.

11. Human trafficking was uncommon in Turkmenistan. From 2013 to 2017, 23 cases of human trafficking were brought under article 129[1] of the Criminal Code, involving 45 victims. In 2017, only one such crime was recorded. All 23 persons were sentenced as a result. None of the cases involved trafficking in children. The Trafficking in Persons Act had been adopted on 15 October 2016; that Act accorded a particular status to victims of human trafficking and provided a legislative base enabling Turkmenistan to counter human trafficking. The Criminal Code had been revised accordingly.

Articles 1 to 6

12. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to know how discrimination was defined in national law, whether the law covered intersecting forms of discrimination, what were the prohibited grounds for discrimination and what penalties were imposed for discriminatory acts. She asked whether the State party would commit to adopting a comprehensive law specifically defining and criminalizing all forms of gender-based violence against women, including domestic violence, rape, marital rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, which would

recognize the intersecting nature of violence and discrimination against women and provide for penalties commensurate with other serious, violent crimes. She would be grateful to know whether there were any timelines for doing so. She wished to learn more about the status of the survey on violence against women referred to in the State party's report, which was still pending approval, and asked when the process of finalizing the survey would be completed. Noting that the title of the survey had changed, she wished to know whether its focus had also been altered. She would appreciate receiving information on which national mechanism or body was responsible for implementing the national action plan on gender equality and details of any monitoring mechanisms to assess activities undertaken.

13. With respect to access to justice, she wished to know what measures Turkmenistan was adopting to promote safe and confidential reporting of crimes and violence against women. The Committee would like to know whether the justice system addressed cases of multiple discrimination against women and, if so, whether those could be covered by a single court or whether cases had to be filed with different courts depending on the grounds. Noting the State party's assurances that national legislation took account of international standards, she asked why it was nevertheless deemed unnecessary to refer to provisions of the Convention in judicial rulings.

14. Article 26 of the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2015 provided that a person subjected to discrimination on the grounds of sex should have the right to appeal to the competent body. She would be grateful for more information concerning that body, including the number of complaints it had reviewed since its establishment, whether legal aid was available to women wishing to appeal and whether the process for submitting complaints was confidential and gender-sensitive. She also wished to know what remedies were available to women, especially those from rural areas, whose rights had been violated. How did women living in rural areas and women living in poverty gain access to legal services and legal aid?

15. The Committee was concerned at reports from alternative sources regarding the ill-treatment of the relatives of the purported victims of enforced disappearance who had stood trial for a presidential assassination attempt, particularly women who had not received any official documentation or copies of the verdicts against their family members and consequently could not appeal against the sentences imposed. She therefore wished to know what measures the State party would take to ensure that prompt, thorough and impartial criminal investigations were conducted into the alleged enforced disappearances and other human rights violations and whether families would be provided with full, effective and gender-sensitive reparation to address the harm they had suffered, including restitution, compensation and rehabilitation.

16. **Mr. Seyilov** (Turkmenistan) said that, in recent years, a raft of new legislation had been introduced to ensure greater compliance with the country's international law and human rights obligations. The promotion and protection of women's and men's equal rights, opportunities and freedoms was a government priority that was also enshrined in the new Constitution of Turkmenistan, as were provisions guaranteeing equal rights to education, health and employment in the civil service. A clear definition of discrimination on the ground of sex was provided for in the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, which had been adopted in 2015. The law included provisions aimed at protecting women from violence, sexual harassment and human trafficking while also guaranteeing their right to participate in the social, political and public life of the country on an equal footing with men.

17. Pursuant to the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan, penalties commensurate with the seriousness of the offence could be imposed in cases of violence or discrimination against women. For example, kidnapping and forced marriage were punishable offences, as was discrimination on the ground of sex in recruitment processes. Lastly, the national action plan on human rights for the period 2016–2020 set forth penalties for all acts of violence against women, including domestic violence.

18. **Ms. Rana**, recalling the recommendations received by Turkmenistan during its universal periodic review and in the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/TKM/CO/3-4), she would appreciate a reply as to whether the Government

intended to introduce legislation prohibiting domestic violence and, if so, what the specific timeline was for its adoption. She asked whether a monitoring mechanism was in place to assess the effectiveness of the awareness-raising campaigns and seminars conducted by the State party to promote gender equality and combat stereotypes. What impact had they had on the lives of women and girls in Turkmenistan?

19. **Mr. Seyilov** (Turkmenistan) said that a study to ascertain the prevalence of violence against women and its root causes had been developed and a list of selected households to take part in the survey was currently being drawn up. Once the results of the survey were known, proposals to introduce new legislation or amend the existing laws would be drafted in order to help the Government determine whether a specific bill on domestic violence was necessary.

20. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that, as far as cases of alleged enforced disappearances were concerned, the Turkmen authorities had met with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on several occasions in Geneva. The Government had provided the Working Group with relevant information and would continue to do so.

21. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said she noted that, according to paragraph 58 of the State party's report, the law guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women and men had provided for the establishment of various gender-equality bodies. She would be interested to know more about those bodies; in particular, she wished to know what their current status and financial resources were, whether they constituted a centralized national machinery for the advancement of women with a clearly defined mandate to promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming and what capacity-building had been provided to staff. She wondered which body was responsible for implementing the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2015–2020 and what was the annual budget allocated for that purpose. It would also be interesting to know the extent to which implementation of that Plan and the National Action Plan on Human Rights 2016–2020 was coordinated. Lastly, she asked whether the State party had taken steps to create an independent national human rights institution, what budget and human resources had been allocated to the recently established Human Rights Ombudsman and whether a dedicated department for gender equality had been set up within a relevant government ministry.

22. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that, despite the introduction of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality, which defined specific measures to improve women's participation in all spheres of public, political, economic, social and cultural life, the periodic report was silent on the outcome of any temporary special measures implemented to accelerate de facto equality between men and women. She wished to know what specific temporary special measures had been implemented to increase women's representation in public and political life, particularly in positions of responsibility and leadership, whether such measures had been evaluated and, if so, what their outcomes had been. Referring to paragraph 8 of the State party's replies to the list of issues, which concerned workplace quotas for persons with disabilities and parents of large families, she asked whether any gender quotas or other temporary special measures had been introduced to boost women's participation in the labour market, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention.

23. **Mr. Orazov** (Turkmenistan) said that the National Action Plan on Gender Equality included a number of temporary special measures aimed at fostering women's representation at all levels of public and political life, in particular in senior positions. The experiences of other countries concerning the use of gender quotas were currently being studied. All State bodies were required to comply with gender-equality legislation and members of the public had recourse to complaints mechanisms if they had faced discrimination on the grounds of sex. Several executive and municipal bodies monitored the implementation of measures to promote gender equality and reported their findings to the Cabinet of Ministers.

24. The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman was an entirely independent body; the Ombudsman enjoyed complete immunity in the exercise of his or her official functions. The financial resources of the Office were allocated from the State budget.

25. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that a working group attached to the Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Commitments Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law was responsible for ensuring that all national action plans were executed in a coordinated manner. Moreover, it monitored their implementation and submitted reports to the Cabinet of Ministers.

26. Work to draw up a sample of households for the domestic violence survey was under way. Efforts were being made to ensure that persons from all walks of life were properly represented; it should not be forgotten that men, too, could be victims of domestic violence.

27. Temporary special measures had been devised to protect and improve the situation of vulnerable groups of the population. Quotas to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and of parents of large families had therefore been introduced. The effectiveness of such quotas was currently being evaluated.

28. **Ms. Rana** said that, despite the introduction of the Voluntary Associations Act of 2014, on the right of citizens to form such associations, there were reports that women human rights defenders and their families had been subjected to harassment, violence, unlawful detention and restrictions on their freedom of movement. She wished to know whether there were independent women's organizations operating in the country, whether they were able to operate unimpeded and what measures were in place to protect women human rights defenders from reprisals.

29. She would welcome further information on the composition of the interdepartmental technical committee set up to formulate national goals and objectives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the proportion of women members. In that connection, she asked how the National Action Plan on Gender Equality related specifically to meeting Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

30. **Ms. Serdarova** (Turkmenistan) said that the Women's Union of Turkmenistan was actively involved in all measures and programmes for the advancement of women at the provincial, district and municipal levels. Among other responsibilities, it sought to protect women and children and promote women's active participation in public life. In that connection, it had conducted awareness-raising activities and held seminars and workshops to inform women, especially in rural areas, of their rights under the Convention and of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality. The Women's Union also operated two centres to foster women's participation in business and enhance women's status in scientific fields. Specific measures included providing training workshops, legal assistance and soft loans to boost their entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. Lastly, women victims of violence were also able to benefit from psychological assistance and support in filing complaints.

31. **Ms. Rana** asked whether human rights defenders had full freedom to form groups and express their opinions, how many such groups existed and what rights and freedoms those had. She asked what the timeline was for completing the survey regarding violence against women.

32. **Ms. Serdarova** (Turkmenistan) said that human rights defenders' organizations were required to register with the Ministry of Justice. Various non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations dealt with issues relating to women, such as family matters. Hotlines were in place and shelters had been established in Ashgabat for women victims of violence.

33. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that everybody had the right to freedom of expression and free speech. His delegation would be pleased to share statistical information on the issue at the afternoon meeting.

34. **Ms. Acar** said that she was concerned that the lack of specific legislation on violence against women was not perceived as an urgent matter and asked what the time frame was for addressing that vacuum in the legal system. She would like data on the number of complaints made under the Criminal Code by women concerning violence

committed against them and information on any corresponding prosecutions and convictions. She asked what steps were being taken to collect sex-disaggregated data on violence against women, taking into account the relationships between the victims and perpetrators. She asked how women who had submitted complaints concerning violence were supported and whether they were offered legal aid, whether a permanent hotline would be set up for women victims of violence and how many shelters were in place for those victims, particularly in rural areas. She asked when the survey on the medical facilities listed by the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry would be conducted and completed. She would like information on the available training in international human rights standards, including the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, for judicial and law enforcement officers, health-care workers and teachers.

35. Highlighting the need to question traditions that curbed women's freedom, she asked whether there were any rules, official or otherwise, governing women's dress code in the public service, whether women were obliged to wear national dress and whether they were prohibited from dying their hair and wearing nail polish, as alternative reports suggested. She asked whether women were required to be accompanied by a male guardian when travelling and whether the police imposed arbitrary restrictions on women's driving and free movement.

36. **Ms. Gabr** asked what impact the State Protection of Victims, Witnesses and Other Participants in Criminal Proceedings Act and the standard operating procedures for the identification of victims of trafficking had had on programmes and funding for assistance for victims, including the provision of free legal aid. She would like details of the training provided to judges, prosecutors and the police on trafficking in persons and the Trafficking in Persons Act, the campaigns launched to raise awareness of trafficking in persons and financial support provided to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in that field. She would like more information on the work of the voluntary association that ran the rehabilitation centre and shelter for victims of trafficking in Ashgabat and its sources of funding. She would also like information on reports that public officials had collaborated with traffickers with impunity. She asked what accounted for the discrepancy between the reported decrease in the rate of trafficking in persons and the simultaneous increase in the number of calls made to the hotline for combating human trafficking. She asked what was being done to address the risk of poor women and girls from rural areas, and stateless persons coming from countries of the former Soviet Union, being trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. She asked what rehabilitation programmes were in place to help women leave prostitution. She wondered whether surveys would be undertaken to assess the root causes of trafficking and prostitution. Would the Government envisage inviting the Special Rapporteur on the human rights aspects of the victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, to visit the country? She asked whether men and women were forced to work without pay during the cotton harvest.

37. **Mr. Orazov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Trafficking in Persons Act had been adopted in 2016 in accordance with international standards and provided for legal, social, medical and psychosocial rehabilitation measures for victims. Specialized government bodies worked to ensure the implementation of that Act in cooperation with NGOs. The National Action Plan of Turkmenistan on Combating Trafficking in Persons for the period 2016–2018 was implemented with the support of international experts, particularly the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Hotlines for victims of trafficking were in place and public information campaigns were led on trafficking in persons. Training was provided for the police and law enforcement agents on procedures for dealing with cases of trafficking and bringing those cases to court, including a training session with representatives from IOM.

38. **Ms. Serdarova** (Turkmenistan) said that national traditions and ethnic minorities' customs were fully protected in Turkmenistan, and all women were free to dress as they chose.

39. **Mr. Orazov** (Turkmenistan) said that under the National Action Plan on Gender Equality campaigns were launched to raise women's awareness of the Convention. In July 2018, the National Presidential Institute of Democracy and Human Rights had held a round

table with the UNFPA office in Turkmenistan and NGOs on gender equality, focusing on rural women's access to reproductive and sexual health care and employment opportunities.

40. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government had been working closely with the International Labour Organization to eradicate forced and child labour in the country, particularly with respect to cotton picking, and improvements were being made to agricultural production with a view to eradicating those practices. Provisions in the Labour Code and the Constitution prohibited the use of forced labour, and policies concerning child protection and education prohibited the exploitation of children. Women and children were not involved in agricultural activity during the school year. Where cases of forced or child labour were identified, proceedings were initiated and fines were imposed.

41. **Ms. Rana** asked whether an enabling environment existed to facilitate women's access to information, particularly in the official information centres for women in the country. She wondered whether the monthly women's magazine *Zenan Kalby* (Woman's Soul) could be more widely disseminated in order to reach relevant stakeholders and mainstream issues regarding the Convention and women's rights. What plans did the Government have to engage boys and men more fully in women's rights-related issues?

42. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that no person worked without being paid in Turkmenistan. Women were not required to be accompanied by a guardian before they could travel. While prostitution was not a serious problem in the country, the Government was nevertheless working closely with international organizations in that regard. The IOM office in Ashgabat, along with a network of NGOs in the field of trafficking in persons, worked in cooperation with government ministries to provide assistance to victims of trafficking and raise awareness of the issue. A visit from the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children, was being considered within the framework of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2015–2020. The Government was in contact with some special procedure mandate holders and was willing to undertake joint initiatives with them if such opportunities arose.

43. **Ms. Serdarova** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government intended to establish additional shelters for women victims of trafficking over the coming years. Further information and disaggregated data on trafficking would be provided in writing at a later date. The high number of calls to the national trafficking hotline did not signify that the number of trafficking victims had increased, but rather that women had been seeking advice and guidance for a range of different issues. Women had the right to travel unaccompanied and many studied or spent holidays abroad.

44. **Ms. Nadaraia**, noting the low participation of women in political and public life, wished to know what measures would be taken to remove the barriers facing women wishing to enter politics, namely the prevalence of negative gender stereotypes, the limited logistical and capacity-building support offered to women candidates and the enforcement of a strict dress code for women holding political office. She also wondered what efforts had been made to accelerate the equal representation of women in decision-making positions, ensure women's participation in civil society and guarantee the safety and security of women human rights defenders.

45. **Mr. Orazov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government had adopted various pieces of legislation to promote and uphold the rights of all persons, including women. Political parties, like the rest of society, must abide by those rules. The Constitution provided for the freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and guaranteed the economic, social and cultural rights of all persons. Civil society and voluntary organizations faced no restrictions and could operate freely. Access to the Internet had also been made readily available across the country.

46. **Ms. Serdarova** (Turkmenistan) said that there was no dress code governing what women should wear. To increase women's participation in political and public life, the Government had launched the "Woman of the Year" competition which aimed to foster a positive image of women as leaders and entrepreneurs in society.

47. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that significant progress had been made towards strengthening women's participation in political and public life. The Speaker of the

parliament was a woman and women held 24.8 per cent of seats in the parliament. Women were also well-represented in government decision-making bodies, including at the local level. Women made up around 45 per cent of the workforce, 23.8 per cent of whom held managerial positions. Two women had also been appointed to serve as the Permanent Representatives of Turkmenistan, to China and to the Permanent Mission of the United Nations in New York respectively, which served as a clear example of how far women could progress within Turkmen society.

48. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to know what steps had been taken to combat the discrimination and negative stereotypes facing women without Turkmen surnames or Turkmen nationality, including whether action had been taken to promote and uphold their rights, strengthen their participation in political and public life, and sanction websites that published degrading and derogatory articles against them. Further information regarding the measures introduced to accelerate the application process to acquire Turkmen nationality would be welcome in that regard.

49. Noting that the results of the 2012 census had not yet been published, she wondered whether the Government would establish a mechanism to collect and disseminate disaggregated data on refugees and stateless persons. It would be particularly useful to know what efforts would be made to ensure the immediate registration of all births in Turkmenistan, regardless of the nationality or immigration status of the parents, and to establish effective statelessness determination procedures for women and girls in order to promote and guarantee their economic, social and cultural rights.

50. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government had granted Turkmen citizenship to more than 18,000 persons in recent years and worked closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to uphold the rights of refugees and stateless persons. The President held regular citizenship ceremonies: some 5,000 persons from 20 different nationalities had been granted Turkmen citizenship during the most recent ceremony. There had been no cases of children born in Turkmenistan who had not been granted Turkmen citizenship.

Articles 10 to 14

51. **Ms. Hayashi**, noting the lack of information available on access to education for women and girls, asked whether steps would be taken to collect in-depth statistical data on the enrolment, completion and dropout rate of women and girls at all levels of the education system. She also wondered what specific measures had been adopted to increase the number of women in higher education, especially in traditionally male-dominated subject areas, and to combat the cultural and social attitudes impeding women's ability to study abroad. It would be particularly interesting to learn what action had been taken to tackle corruption in the university admissions process and uphold women's right to education, particularly women in rural areas, women with disabilities and women from low-income backgrounds. She would also welcome clarification as to whether the sexual and reproductive health education offered to women and girls covered a broad range of issues, including preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

52. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would like further information regarding the impact of the recent national education reforms on women's access to the labour market. She wished to know what specific factors prevented women from taking full advantage of the free education system to acquire the skills and training required to enter traditionally male-dominated industries and what action had been taken to address those barriers to employment. It would also be useful to learn more about progress made under the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men to promote women's access to decent work, including with respect to the ratio of women to men employees in male-dominated sectors and the proportion of women studying non-traditional subjects abroad. Further information on the steps taken to promote women's access to vocational training would be particularly welcome in that regard.

53. Noting that the misuse of alcohol had led to a decline in the male population, forcing women to become second or third wives and leading to the underemployment of men, she wondered whether such circumstances had played a role in the low representation of

women in the transport, construction and other industrial sectors and, if so, whether the Government intended to introduce educational programmes and special temporary measures to rectify that situation.

54. **Ms. Chalal** asked what steps had been taken to guarantee women's access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health services, especially effective, modern forms of contraception. It would be interesting to know whether the Government intended to repeal the regulations stipulating that adolescent girls must obtain parental consent to access emergency contraception and abortion services.

55. In the light of the fact that home births had been defined as a criminal offence, she wondered what measures had been taken to facilitate rural women's access to suitable health-care facilities. Further information on the efforts made to strengthen sexual and reproductive health education, including by introducing specific modules on combating sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and gender-based violence against women, would also be welcome in that context. Lastly, she asked what policies had been adopted to ensure prompt access to effective HIV/AIDs screening, diagnosis and treatment services for women and girls and to combat the discrimination and stigma faced by women and girls with the disease.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.